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to the method born

tv personality samantha harris shows off her favorite moves—and rockin' pilates body

BY ANNE MARIE O'CONNOR

not many people can say they first learned Pilates at their mother's knee, but Samantha Harris can. The superfit correspondent and substitute anchor for *The Insider* and cohost of *Dancing with the Stars* received her introduction to the method when she came home from Northwestern University and discovered that her mother had installed a mini Reformer in the basement. And in suburban Minneapolis in the early 1990s, home Pilates apparatus were as about as common as 80° days in January.

"My mother told me, 'I just discovered this new thing called Pilates,'" recalls Harris. "I had never heard of Pilates, but she was a dancer and always on the cutting edge of developments in the exercise world. She was raving about it. She loved that she could feel her muscles lengthening and strengthening. Her enthusiasm got me excited to try it myself—I wanted to learn the 'newest,' coolest way to work out, too." (It was only later that Harris found out that Pilates had actually been around for a long time.)

After watching her mother go through her workout, Harris tried out the mini Reformer herself for the first time. "My mom showed me the proper form and some exercises to do. I realized I was working all those tiny little muscles you forget about when you're just using the machines at the gym," she says.

Like her mom, Harris also has a dance background. She studied ballet in elementary school and was on the varsity dance line for three years in high school. But when she went to college, she says, "All of a sudden the rigorous workout I automatically got on



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samantha's insider moves



▲ supine spine twist

"I like ending with a few more stretches like the Spine Twist sitting and then lying down. Then I sit in Child's Pose for a few minutes."



▼ roll-down ▼

"I love the full body Roll-down. It's such a great warm-up."



▲ plank (with leg lifts)

"Since you're working the core anyhow, you might as well flip over and do Plank. To make it even harder, I like to lift one leg up at a time."

the dance team stopped. For the first time, I had to make an effort to keep my body active." So she signed up for jazz dance classes a couple of days a week and started going to the gym. "I did the treadmill thing, which I found just inane. It's the most boring thing. It doesn't exactly get you excited to hit the gym."

Harris always knew that she wanted to pursue a career in entertainment television, so she moved to Los Angeles after graduating from Northwestern with a degree in journalism. She immediately did the L.A. thing and joined a gym. "That's when I discovered classes," she says. "I took a myriad of aerobics, kickboxing, interval and weights classes." Unlike the treadmill, where you're in your own world, classes sparked her interest. "I liked the feeling of people huffing and puffing all together, moving for a common purpose," she says. "The variety of classes also kept my body challenged."

Not surprisingly, one of the toughest ones Harris tried was a Pilates mat class. "I thought of myself as having a strong core, but that first time I remember thinking, *Oh my gosh, how am I going to get through this?* It was so much harder on my stomach muscles than anything else, especially doing the Magic Circle exercises. I was shocked at how difficult it was and how sore I felt the next day."

She especially loved the mat classes taught by Patrick

Goudeau at Equinox. "First of all, he's an amazing specimen—his body is in such great shape," she says. "It's an inspiring thing to watch him while you're working out, but it's so much more than that. He has an effusive energy, a positive attitude and an ability to get us in the mood to embrace the exercises we're doing. Plus I love that he kicks my butt!"

Pilates gave her body a long, lean look that she loved—and that's key for someone who's only 5'4" and can easily look too bulky on television. And within a few years of arriving in L.A., Harris was in front of the camera a lot. By 2003 she was the weekend cohost for the entertainment news show *Extra* and by 2005 working for *E! News*. She also filled in numerous times on *The View*. ("I've been on in each of its incarnations," she says, starting with the original lineup with Meredith Vieira and Star Jones.) In 2006 she got her dream job as cohost of *Dancing with the Stars*. "I come from a family of dancers, and I'm the biggest fan!" Then, in January 2009, she landed another job as full-time correspondent for *The Insider*.

As her career has advanced, Harris has come to really appreciate the mental advantage that Pilates has given her. "It was challenging for me at first, in that it was hard to be in the moment and focus on the breath and on what my body's doing and not let my mind wander. But I've definitely been



▼ side-leg kicks

"I took ballet when I was seven and quit to play basketball, but I'm still flexible enough for this move."



california row series ▼

Newsflash! Kristin McGee taught the L.A.-based TV host this bicep- and tricep-toning move at our photo shoot.



mermaid ▶

"Everything you do in Pilates really hits your core!"



▲ single-straight-leg stretch

"This exercise is fantastic because it helps engage my abs and I get an amazing hamstring stretch at the same time."

able to apply that practice in my real life. Whenever I find that nervous energy bubbling up when I'm about to do a new job on TV in front of millions of people, I go into that focused breathing and it really helps. It helps calm me and center me. It's a wonderful trick!"

She also found her Pilates training helpful when she gave birth to daughter Josselyn in 2007. "Everyone asked me, 'Are you taking childbirth classes?' I said 'No, I think my yoga and Pilates will get me through it.'" She jokes, "Actually the epidural got me through it, but the breathing was also helpful."

Harris, who only took three weeks off from shooting *Dancing with the Stars* after giving birth, seemed to lose the baby weight in about 10 minutes. Her secret? "Being very fit before I was pregnant. Plus I was very lucky. I had a great pregnancy and didn't gain a lot of weight. Two and a half weeks after giving birth, I was able to start yoga, Pilates and interval cardio classes."

Her hectic schedule keeps her on the road frequently, as she does everything from covering the inauguration in Washington, D.C., to filling in for Meredith Vieira on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* in New York. When she travels, she brings along Pilates DVDs by Mari Winsor and Patrick Goudeau. "I don't really like working out on my own—I like having 'leadership.' I have a tough time finding ones that can

inspire me and challenge me enough, and those are the only ones," she says. She also packs resistance bands to make the workouts tougher while taking up minimal suitcase room. "It's all about quick and easy packing," she says.

At home, Harris' toughest trainer is Josselyn, who's now a year and a half old. "We put on music and dance. She likes the exercise ball and has me do a workout she's created called Dance Party on an Exercise Ball. I have to put her on the ball and bounce her. It's fun—and it really does work your core!"

Back in Minnesota, Harris' mother still uses her mini Reformer several times a week. "She has the most amazing arm muscles and gorgeous legs," Harris reports. Though Harris rarely has the chance to visit home and use her mom's machine, her coworkers at *The Insider*, anchor Lara Spencer and executive producer Linda Bell Blue, just bought a Cadillac to keep in the studio. "They told me I can use it any time I want," Harris says. "I'd love to try those very cool athletic-looking upside-down moves. Or the Standing Split where you're actually moving your standing leg. I can do it on solid ground, but I'd love to try it on the machine." Mom will be so proud. ●

Anne Marie O'Connor is a senior editor of *Pilates Style*.